# New distributional records of birds from western Ecuador, and comments on the avifauna of Isla de La Plata

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Distribution of birds in Ecuador is fairly well documented based on more than a century of collections and field research recently summarised by Ridgely & Greenfield (2001), which facilitated the identification of 107 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the country (Freile & Santander 2005). New distributional records are published with regularity as new areas are explored or bird lists are compiled as a result of intensive field work. Here I present new records of birds from the western lowlands, based on visits to deciduous and semi-deciduous forests and wetlands of the Tumbesian Endemic Bird Area (Stattersfield *et al.* 1998). I also document new breeding records for Isla de la Plata (see Cisneros-Heredia 2005) and briefly discuss the dynamics of avian colonisation and breeding on this small continental island. I follow Ridgely & Greenfield (2001) for systematics and BirdLife International



Figure 1. Map of western Ecuador showing study sites (circles and numbers, see Table 1). The grey-shaded area represents land above 600 m.

TABLE 1 Localities in western Ecuador where bird species herein reported were recorded.

Site, province	Coordinates	Elevation	Habitat	Survey dates		
1) Reserva Integral Montecaimito,	00°42′N, 80°05′W	N, 80°05′W 0–50 m humid hill forest, secondary		4-7 and 27-31		
south-west Esmeraldas			woodland, coastal scrub	December 2004		
2) Mompiche, Esmeraldas	00°28′N, 80°00′W	sea level	humid secondary forest, coastal scrub, young mangrove	24–27 March 2005		
3) Cojimíes estuary, Manabí	00°21′N, 80°01′W	sea level	mangrove, muddy banks, beaches	29 July 2006		
4) Chorrera, Manabí	00°03′N, 80°03′W	sea level	coastal estuary	28 July 2006		
5) Finca Integral Río Muchacho,	00°25′S, 80°26′W	30 m	semi-deciduous forest	8–12 September		
20 km north of Bahía de Caráquez,			and woodland	2005; 8–12		
Manabí				February 2006		
6) Reserva Cerro Seco, Bahía de	00°35′S, 80°25′W	0-30 m	deciduous forest and scrub	30 October-2		
Caráquez, Manabí				November 2004		
7) Humedal La Segua, Manabí	00°41′S, 80°09′W	10 m	freshwater marshland	3 March 2007		
8) Isla de La Plata, Manabí	01°16′S, 81°03′W	0–150 m	coastal scrub, woodland, shrubby open land	5–9 February 2008		
9) Refugio de Vida Silvestre	02°31′S, 80°04′W	5 m	dry scrub, artificial wetland	29-31 August		
Parque Lago, Guayas				2005		
10) El Aromo, 8 km east of	02°43′S, 79°38′W	200 m	humid foothill secondary	26–28 August		
Naranjal, Guayas			forest and borders	2005		

(2008) for conservation status (IUCN threatened categories are indicated following the scientific name).

# Study sites

Field work was undertaken from December 2004 through February 2008 at ten localities in Esmeraldas, Manabí, Guayas and the recently created Santa Elena provinces (Table 1, Fig. 1). Field work consisted primarily of 3–4 days of intensive observations in each area, using playback to elicit rapid responses from key species. Single days of intensive observations were made at sites 3, 4 and 7 and six mist-nets were opened at sites 1, 5 and 6 during two days (=12 sampling hours/site). Observations at Isla de La Plata were made during five intensive days totalling nearly 40 observation hours throughout 'inland' habitats.

# New records and range extensions

# PALE-BROWED TINAMOU Crypturellus transfasciatus

Natural vocalisations and responses to playback were regularly heard and tape-recorded in secondary forest at Cerro Seco (November 2004) and in secondary forest, woodland and agricultural fields at Río Muchacho (September 2005 and February 2006). Dry forest at Cerro Seco is dominated by young second growth with a few *Ceiba* trees, whilst forests at Río Muchacho are more extensive, with taller remnant trees and dense understorey, and agricultural areas are interspersed with woodland and small patches of remnant scrub. At least three also heard in secondary forest patches and scrub around La Villega lagoon (00°03′N, 80°02′W), 5 km east of Pedernales, prov. Manabí (July 2006). Previously known north to the Bahía de Caráquez region (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001), but recent records from, e.g. Río Muchacho, La Villega and Reserva Lalo Loor (pers. obs. April 2008), have extended its range north to the Pedernales area (Ridgely & Greenfield 2006).

#### **NORTHERN SHOVELER** Anas clypeata

A male was seen briefly with a group of 35 Blue-winged Teals *Anas discors* on open water near floating vegetation, and subsequently was observed in flight amongst a flock of *c*.235 *A. discors*, at La Segua wetland on 3 March 2007, using a telescope. It was identified by its green head contrasting markedly with the white foreparts, and massive bill, which pattern was noted both on the water and in flight, and is quite unlike that of other *Anas* in the area (*discors* and *bahamensis*). Its flight silhouette also differed from *A. discors* by its long neck and heavier body. Madge & Burn (1988) was consulted shortly after the observation. This is the second record of this boreal migrant in Ecuador, following one at Ecuasal, prov. Santa Elena (formerly Guayas) (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001). One was also observed by R. S. Ridgely, B. Haase, F. Sornoza and R. Quinn (R. S. Ridgely pers. comm.) at Humedales de Pacoa, prov. Santa Elena on 20 January 2007, which was perhaps the same individual moving north. Evidence (i.e. photographs, recordings or specimens) is still needed to document the species' occasional presence in Ecuador.

#### YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT HERON Nyctanassa violacea

In March 2005 two were at a small estuary surrounded by young mangrove near Mompiche town. In waterbird censuses at La Chorrera and the Cojimíes estuary, 15 and 80 individuals were recorded, at least 50% of them juveniles (suggesting local breeding). There are few records north of the environs of Bahía de Caráquez (just two mentioned by Ridgely & Greenfield 2001, from prov. Esmeraldas). These records suggest a continuous distribution along the entire Ecuadorian coast (see Solano-Ugalde *et al.* submitted).

#### WOOD STORK Mycteria americana

A single soaring over abandoned shrimp ponds at Chorrera on 28 July 2006 eventually flew off south. One was also observed in February 2005 at the same wetland (T. Santander pers. comm.), and a few have also been observed there since then, always in flight (L. Madrid pers. comm.). Not previously recorded north of the río Chone. However, records at Pedernales might only represent vagrants from the Chone estuary.

### RUFOUS-NECKED WOOD RAIL Aramides axillaris

Two singles in degraded mangrove at the Cojimíes estuary in July 2006, foraging on open mud then rapidly scurrying inside the mangrove. Ridgely & Greenfield (2001) already suggested that the species might be continuously distributed along the entire Ecuadorian coast (see Solano-Ugalde *et al.* submitted). Nevertheless, they knew of only one record from Esmeraldas (at Muisne mangroves) and none from Manabí. The extensive destruction of mangrove in Ecuador makes this and other mangrove-dwellers highly threatened (Hilgert & Benavides 2002).

### ANDEAN COOT Fulica ardesiaca

One observed at close range with a telescope within a small flock of Common Gallinules *Gallinula chloropus* at La Segua in March 2007. The frontal shield was all white and extended towards the front. A previous observation at this site was mentioned by López-Lanús & Gastezzi (2000) but was regarded as unconfirmed due to the lack of evidence. Also recorded at La Segua in August 1995 (D. F. Cisneros-Heredia *in litt*. 2008) and November 2003 (R. Ahlman *in litt*. 2008).

#### AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER Pluvialis dominica

One observed for *c.*40 minutes at a small estuary north of Mompiche in March 2005. It was foraging with several Wilson's Plovers *Charadrius wilsonia*, Least *Calidris minutilla* and Spotted Sandpipers *Actitis macularius*, and Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*. The following features were noted: pale gold spots and stripes, a fairly conspicuous whitish superciliary contrasting with the duskier crown, and the lack of black axillaries (as in Grey Plover *P. squatarola*). Known from few sites in western Ecuador, primarily in the south, but could occur as a transient almost anywhere in the country (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001). I am unaware of any other records from provs. Manabí and Esmeraldas.

#### WILSON'S PLOVER Charadrius wilsonia

A flock of 5–6 was observed at the small estuary north of Mompiche in March 2005 (see previous species), repeatedly performing a hide-and-run behaviour when followed by the observer. Two were also observed foraging on mudflats at the Cojimíes estuary within a large flock of sandpipers, plovers and egrets in July 2006. The species' presence north the Chone estuary is not well documented but is probably continuous.

#### **GULL-BILLED TERN** Sterna nilotica

A total of 153 was counted at the Cojimíes estuary in July 2006. Groups of up to 40 were observed, mainly at shrimp ponds, but no direct evidence of breeding was noted. They were identified by the heavy and fairly short bill (compared to Sandwich Tern *S. sandvicensis* also present). Henry (2005) reported adults feeding dependent young, whilst a breeding colony was observed by D. F. Cisneros-Heredia (*in litt*. 2008) in April 2006, at Isla Jupiter, just south of Mompiche. Breeding is therefore confirmed for northern Manabí and southern Esmeraldas.

# **OCHRE-BELLIED DOVE** Leptotila ochraceiventris

Several responded to playback in secondary forest at Río Muchacho in September 2005, but none was heard there in February 2006. There is an old record from central Manabí, c.10 km south of Río Muchacho (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001, 2006). Beyond the Chone estuary it probably extends to the Pedernales area, *c.*70 km to the north, but this requires confirmation.

# CENTRAL AMERICAN SCREECH OWL Otus (Megascops) centralis

One heard on 6 December and two heard (one tape-recorded) on 28–30 December 2004 in secondary forest and forest borders at Reserva Integral Montecaimito, with two additional birds heard at Playa Coquito, *c*.5 km to the south, also in secondary woodland in March 2007. Forest at the latter has been regenerating over the last ten years, with some small forest corridors and secondary forest patches connecting to more extensive forest to the east. A recent record from Partidero-Poza Honda, 5 km south-southwest of Montecaimito (Benítez 2005) was based only on comments from local people. All previous records are from the Andean foothills (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001). It should be searched for in the nearby Mache-Chindul Mountains as other species of the Andean foothills and slopes have been recorded there (Carrasco *et al.* 2008), as well as in the forested hills of the Quingue–Caimito–Cabo San Francisco area to the west (see below).

# WEST PERUVIAN SCREECH OWL Otus (Megascops) roboratus

At least six individuals responded to playback on 30 October-1 November 2004 in secondary forest and adjacent areas at Reserva Cerro Seco. Ridgely & Greenfield (2001) do not

mention records from central Manabí. My record extends its distribution north to the Bahía de Caráquez region. Playback at Río Muchacho, c.20 km further north, failed to detect the species.

# GREEN-CROWNED BRILLIANT Heliodoxa jacula

A female was mist-netted in primary forest, close to a forest border, at Reserva Montecaimito on 5 December 2004. The species was recently recorded in the nearby Mache-Chindul Mountains down to 300 m (Parker & Carr 1992) and at Partidero-Poza Honda, 5 km south-southwest of Montecaimito, at 150 m (Benítez 2005). My record extends the range of H. jacula further west, close to the coast and down to 100 m. It has been suggested that the presence of *H. jacula* in the lowlands is only seasonal (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001).

#### RUFOUS-TAILED JACAMAR Galbula ruficauda

One seen and heard in a secondary forest fragment at Caimito on 29 December 2004. According to Ridgely & Greenfield (2001) there are no records from the Caimito area, and its presence in the Mache-Chindul Mountains is only suspected but has not been recorded to date.

# BLACKISH-HEADED SPINETAIL Synallaxis tithys

On 31 October-1 November 2004 a pair was observed and tape-recorded in secondary woodland dominated by young trees and cacti, at Reserva Cerro Seco. They had a nest in a dense spiny Mimosaceae tree, 3 m above ground, similar to that described by Balchin (1996). This Endangered species (BirdLife International 2008) occurs north to the Bahía de Caráquez region. Numbers have seemingly declined in recent years, making new records particularly from protected areas—important.

# **EASTERN KINGBIRD** Tyrannus tyrannus

One was observed for over 15 minutes atop Ceiba and Bursera trees in Reserva Cerro Seco, on 1 November 2004. Vegetation is dominated by dry forest on a steep slope overlooking the ocean. This is the first record of *T. tyrannus* south of prov. Pichincha and from the Ecuadorian coast, as well as one of the few records west of the Andes (see Vogt 2007).

**TAWNY-CROWNED GREENLET** *Hylophilus ochraceiceps*Several were observed on visits to Reserva Montecaimito and surroundings on 4–7 and 27–31 December 2004, mostly in the canopy and borders of secondary forest patches, often within mixed-species flocks. No previous records from southern prov. Esmeraldas (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001), even from the fairly well-known Bilsa Biological Station, in Mache-Chindul Ecological Reserve, c.45 km east of the Quingue-Caimito area (Hornbuckle & Mudd 1997; L. Carrasco in litt. 2008).

## SPECKLE-BREASTED WREN Thryothorus sclateri

On 11 September 2005 a group of at least four was seen and heard in a dense tangle of vines and understorey vegetation at Río Muchacho. The northernmost records in coastal Ecuador known to Ridgely & Greenfield (2001) were from the environs of Bahía de Caráquez, 20 km south of Río Muchacho, but subsequently they (Ridgely & Greenfield 2006) extended its range to Pedernales.

#### PROTONOTARY WARBLER Protonotaria citrea

On 5 December 2004 I observed three foraging in secondary forest at Reserva Integral Montecaimito, at 20 m. They were accompanying a mixed-species flock including Dotwinged Antwren *Microrhopias quixensis*, Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*, Red-legged Honeycreeper *Cyanerpes cyaneus*, White-shouldered Tanager *Tachyphonus luctuosus* and Buff-winged Saltator *Saltator maximus*, and were in the subcanopy near a small stream that flows into a freshwater pond near the sea. They were observed at close range (3–5 m), and identified by the bright yellow extending to the belly and flanks, white undertail-coverts and greyish flight-feathers. One appeared duller and was perhaps a female. They were not observed again on the following days. There are few records of *P. citrea* in Ecuador, and this is the first from southern prov. Esmeraldas, the closest being an old specimen taken at Esmeraldas city (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001).

# New sites for threatened species

Though not extending current ranges, Table 2 summarises new sites for threatened species (BirdLife International 2008) and Tumbesian EBA endemics (Stattersfield *et al.* 1998).

#### Cerro El Aromo

On 28–29 August 2005 the following widespread species were noted c.20 km south of previously known localities. Their presence was not unexpected as humid foothill forest continues south to southern prov. Guayas and adjacent El Oro.

Four pairs of White-flanked Antwrens Myrmotherula axillaris and at least three pairs of Dot-winged Antwrens Microrhopias quixensis were observed and heard in mixed-species flocks in secondary forest at El Aromo. Flocks were led by M. axillaris and Checker-throated Antwren M. fulviventris, and also comprised One-coloured Becard Platypsaris homochrous, Plain Xenops Xenops minutus, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher Mionectes oleagineus, Tropical Gnatcatcher Polioptila plumbea, White-shouldered Tanager Tachyphonus luctuosus, Olivaceous Woodcreeper Sittasomus griseicapillus, Pacific Elaenia Myiopagis subplacens, Lesser Greenlet Hylophilus decurtatus and Blue-black Grosbeak Cyanocompsa cyanoides. Also, Masked Tityra Tityra semifasciata was observed in the canopy, Southern Nightingale Wren Microcerculus marginatus was heard inside secondary forest and three pairs of Guira Tanagers Hemithraupis guira foraged within mixed-species flocks at forest borders.

#### Isla de La Plata

Cisneros-Heredia (2005) recently updated bird records from this small island just 30 km off the Manabí coast. Isla de La Plata has been repeatedly visited by ornithologists since Chapman (1926) and Murphy (1936), but the most intensive effort to survey its avifauna only came in 1990 (Ortiz-Crespo & Agnew 1992).

I recorded six new landbirds to the island during a strong rainy season that permitted intense vegetation growth (pers. obs.). Grey-capped Cuckoo *Coccyzus lansbergi* was heard daily and three were seen at close range in dense woodland. Song is reportedly given only when breeding (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001) thus suggesting local nesting. Anthony's Nightjar *Caprimulgus anthonyi* was heard only once, but nocturnal surveys were not specifically performed, so it could be more numerous. A single female Ringed Kingfisher *Megaceryle torquata* was observed twice on one day but not subsequently. Streaked Flycatcher *Myiodynastes maculatus* was observed three times at woodland borders, whilst two Baird's Flycatchers *M. bairdii* were heard daily and seen chasing each other, also at woodland borders. Finally, Black-lored Yellowthroat *Geothlypis auricularis* (*sensu* Ridgely &

#### TABLE 2

List of Tumbesian EBA endemics and threatened species recorded at seven study sites (excluding wetlands). See Table 1 for site details: (1) Reserva Integral Montecaimito, (2) Mompiche, (5) Finca Integral Río Muchacho, (6) Reserva Cerro Seco, (8) Isla de La Plata, (9) Refugio de Vida Silvestre Parque Lago, (10) Cerro El Aromo. Endemism follows Stattersfield *et al.* (1998) and threat category follows BirdLife International (2008).

Species	1	2	5	6	8	9	10
Pale-browed Tinamou Crypturellus transfasciatus (NT)	*	*					
Grey-backed Hawk Leucopternis occidentalis (EN)	*	*	*				
Rufous-headed Chachalaca Ortalis erythroptera (VU)	*	*	*				
Brown Wood Rail Aramides wolfi (VU)	*						
Ecuadorian Ground Dove Columbina buckleyi	*	*	*	*	*		
Ochre-bellied Dove Leptotila ochraceiventris (VU)	*						
Red-masked Parakeet Aratinga erythrogenys (NT)	*	*					
Grey-cheeked Parakeet Brotogeris pyrrhopterus (EN)	*	*					
Pacific Parrotlet Forpus coelestis	*	*	*	*	*	*	
Anthony's Nightjar Caprimulgus anthonyi	*	*	*				
West Peruvian Screech Owl Otus (Megascops) roboratus	*						
Little Woodstar Chaetocercus bombus (VU)	*						
Orange-fronted Barbet Capito squamatus (NT)	*	*					
Ecuadorian Piculet Picumnus sclateri	*						
Guayaquil Woodpecker Campephilus gayaquilensis (NT)	*	*					
Blackish-headed Spinetail Synallaxis tithys (EN)	*						
Collared Antshrike Sakesphorus bernardi	*						
Elegant Crescentchest Melanopareia elegans	*						
Pacific Elaenia Myiopagis subplacens	*	*	*				
Grey-breasted Flycatcher Lathrotriccus griseipectus (VU)	*						
Sooty-crowned Flycatcher Myiarchus phaeocephalus	*	*	*				
Baird's Flycatcher Myiodynastes bairdii	*						
Pacific Royal Flycatcher Onychorhynchus occidentalis (VU)	*						
Slaty Becard Pachyramphus spodiurus (EN)	*						
Ecuadorian Thrush Turdus maculirostris	*	*	*	*			
Plumbeous-backed Thrush Turdus reevei	*						
Fasciated Wren Campylorhynchus fasciatus	*	*	*				
Grey-and-gold Warbler Basileuterus fraseri	*						
Black-capped Sparrow Arremon abeillei	*						
Crimson-breasted Finch Rhodospingus cruentus	*	*	*				
White-edged Oriole Icterus graceannae	*						

Greenfield 2001, 2006) was observed daily in reasonable numbers (four singing males along a 200-m trail). Local breeding seems probable.

To date the avifauna of Isla de La Plata (76 species) includes 34 marine or coastal species and 42 landbirds (Table 3). However, only six seabirds and ten landbirds are reported to breed (Cisneros-Heredia 2005). I noted breeding evidence (nests, begging chicks, courtship display, intense singing) for 15 species, including seven not previously reported to do so (Table 3). Further, I did not record the introduced House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, a species unlikely to be overlooked, whilst Tumbes Pewee *Contopus punensis*, previously reported as a breeder, was also apparently absent during my survey.

The differences in landbird composition, especially the breeding community, reported here suggest regular immigration and extinction/emigration from the mainland. This might also account for 28 terrestrial species recorded only once on the island (Cisneros-Heredia 2005). I suspect that the breeding avifauna of Isla de La Plata will continue to change in the future, and that climate plays a key role in shaping species composition on

#### TABLE 3

Landbird avifauna of Isla de La Plata. Bold indicates breeding species; 28 species recorded just once are omitted (see Cisneros-Heredia 2005). Note different survey months (=seasons), more birds are expected to breed during rainy months (December–April/May) than dry months (June–November).

July-September 1990
(Ortiz-Crespo & Agnew 1992)
Turkey Vulture Cathartes aura
Plumbeous Kite Ictinia plumbea
Croaking Ground Dove Columbina cruziana
Groove-billed Ani Crotophaga sulcirostris
Short-tailed Woodstar Myrmia micrura
Vermilion Flycatcher Pyrocephalus rubinus
Long-tailed Mockingbird Mimus longicaudatus
House Wren Troglodytes aedon
Southern Yellow Grosbeak Pheucticus chrysogaster
Collared Warbling Finch Poospiza hispaniolensis
Peruvian Meadowlark Sturnella bellicosa
House Sparrow Passer domesticus

July 2000
(Cisneros-Heredia 2005)
Cattle Egret Bubulcus ibis
Turkey Vulture Cathartes aura
Ecuadorian Ground Dove Columbina buckleyi
Croaking Ground Dove Columbina cruziana
Short-tailed Woodstar Myrmia micrura
Little Woodstar Chaetocercus bombus
Grey-and-white Tyrannulet Pseudelaenia leucospodia

Yellow-bellied Elaenia Elaenia flavogaster
Red-eyed Vireo Vireo olivaceus
Long-tailed Mockingbird Mimus longicaudatus
Southern Yellow Grosbeak Pheucticus chrysogaster
Collared Warbling Finch Poospiza hispaniolensis
House Sparrow Passer domesticus

February 2008
(this study)
Cattle Egret Bubulcus ibis
Striated Heron Butorides striatus
Turkey Vulture Cathartes aura
Peregrine Falcon Falco peregrinus
Croaking Ground Dove Columbina cruziana
Eared Dove Zenaida auriculata
Grey-capped Cuckoo Coccyzus lansbergi
Anthony's Nightjar Caprimulgus anthonyi
Short-tailed Woodstar Myrmia micrura

Ringed Kingfisher Megaceryle torquita
Grey-and-white Tyrannulet Pseudelaenia leucospodia
Tawny-crowned Pygmy Tyrant Euscarthmus meloryphus
Vermilion Flycatcher Pyrocephalus rubinus
Streaked Flycatcher Myjodynastes maculatus

Baird's Flycatcher Myiodynastes bairdii Snowy-throated Kingbird Tyrannus niveigularis Red-eyed Vireo Vireo olivaccus

Long-tailed Mockingbird Mimus longicaudatus House Wren Troglodytes aedon

Black-lored Yellowthroat Geothlypis auricularis Southern Yellow Grosbeak Pheucticus chrysogaster Crimson-breasted Finch Rhodospingus cruentus Collared Warbling Finch Poospiza hispaniolensis

Peruvian Meadowlark Sturnella bellicosa

the island. Annual surveys will provide further insights into the dynamics of the landbird community.

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